

Wheels Within Wheels

The average American spends a little less than two minutes a day on reading about foreign affairs in the newspapers. That covers about four headlines and two paragraphs. In addition, there may be another few minutes of headline coverage by TV commentators.

The fact is that Americans (and probably all other national populations) do not feel competent to deal with their government's foreign policy, except for an unusual item now and again. In one survey, the majority of Americans actually said that the government should *not* consult with the people in making foreign policy decisions.



Raab

The problem is that so much is going on behind the scenes — often necessarily — that most citizens do not feel that they have sufficient facts on which to base a sound decision.

This is the problem, for example, in trying to assess some details of American foreign policy on the Middle East. One day, the newspapers announce an arms deal with Saudi Arabia. The next day, the newspapers announce a U.S. deal to supply Israel with oil. And so forth. That may come to be known as the Kissinger Shuffle. And the easiest view of it is that the U.S. is playing both ends against the middle — and we all know who will end up in the middle.

But then there is the question of what we do not know. The hidden wheels within the wheels. We have always sold arms to Saudi Arabia. They certainly don't need financial assistance. They are going to buy arms some place. If they buy more arms from us, will they buy less arms from France and Great Britain? Is that bad for Israel, or is it good? Would it be better for Israel if Saudi Arabia had a stronger relationship to France than to the United States? This kind of question has arisen before in another context. We sell arms to Jordan. Our influence vis-a-vis Jordan is important for Israel. Would we really want to cut off our sale of arms to Jordan, turning them to another source? Would Israel really want us to cut off that sale of arms to Jordan?

Then there is the matter of the United States reaching a new agreement in the past few weeks with respect to increasing Israel's defense capacity. Does the loud announcement of a U.S. sales deal to Saudi Arabia, which is not really news — serve the purpose of taking the publicity edge off the agreement with Israel?

So, the wheels turn within wheels — and most of us don't know enough about what actually is going on to have a sure judgment about every American move.

We *can* make judgments on the openly critical issues. We know that there is a massive arms build-up from the Soviet Union to Arab countries. In less than a year, over two billion dollars worth of arms have been sent to Syria by the Soviet Union. Israel needs arms assistance in order to maintain some balance. Either the United States provides that assistance or it does not; there are no wheels within wheels on that proposition. So far, the United States *is* providing that assistance.

Or there is the matter of a P.L.O. representative being formally recognized by the United Nations. Either the United States opposes that recognition or it does not. There are no wheels within wheels there, either. The United States *did* oppose that recognition, along with practically no one else.

So, most of us probably have to measure the U.S. government's friendliness towards Israel by its actions on these critical issues. On the trickier items, we can just guess, and hope for the best.